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UNICEF EDUCATION

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Case Study

MONGOLIA

A multi-level, cross-sectoral response to improving adolescent mental health

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Mongolia has among the [highest rates](#) of adolescent suicide in East Asia and the Pacific. According to UNICEF data, suicide and road injury are the most prevalent causes of death for adolescents aged 10–19. Compounding this public health issue were challenges in providing quality mental health and psychological support services to meet the growing needs of adolescents, and a lack of supportive programmes within schools aimed at building adolescents' resilience and promoting positive mental health and wellbeing.

UNICEF has supported the Mongolian Government in developing and implementing a multi-level, cross-sectoral response to improving adolescent mental health and wellbeing through the influence of policies and programmes, capacity building, and adolescent empowerment. With convening support from UNICEF, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) introduced mental health counselling in secondary schools in two provinces and organized [capacity building activities](#) for school doctors and social workers. A counselling module has also been integrated into national teacher in-service training. Additionally, mental health literacy and life skills programmes were integrated into secondary schools. The life skills programmes 'My Family' (ages 10–14) and 'My World' (ages 15–18) are being implemented to support adolescent's and youth's socio-emotional learning, specifically to promote resilience, and to encourage communication with families, peers and teachers. Parents' evenings were organized within school communities and parenting education modules were made available to reduce stigma surrounding mental health.

After Mongolia closed all schools and kindergartens in response to COVID-19, UNICEF with the MoES organized virtual trainings for education professionals on how to support the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of students. UNICEF also led an [initiative to create child-friendly learning content for children 4 to 7 years old](#), developing audio lessons and uploading them into 1,300 emergency radio equipment distributed across the country to reach children without stable access to TV the internet. Additionally, UNICEF launched a virtual campaign named “[From Awareness to Action; let’s keep our mind healthy!](#)”. Around 400 youth volunteers (93 per cent female and 7 per cent male) were trained and supported to disseminate information around mental health with their friends, communities, and loved ones, helping to promote healthy lifestyles and reducing stress and anxiety.

RESULTS

- 452,909 children (228,424 girls and 224,485 boys) have accessed mental health literacy in secondary schools (grades 4–12).
- 57,000 children in 7 out of 30 provinces participated in the ‘My Family’ and ‘My World’ life skills programmes.
- 1,130 school social workers, doctors, and teachers have participated in-person and virtual training on school counselling.
- 702 government officials participated in virtual workshops on supporting students’ mental health during COVID-19.

Cost effectiveness: Over the past two years, UNICEF’s investment of US\$ 190,000 has supported capacity building activities for 1,130 school doctors, social workers, and teachers and the life skills programme for *57,000 children and adolescents*.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Leveraging UNICEF’s convening capacity provides an opportunity for cross-sectoral collaboration to integrate mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in education.** UNICEF’s role in the development of the National Programme on Child Protection, which included mental health as a priority, provided a pathway for the convening of the first National Conference on Adolescent Mental Health which championed the integration of MHPSS and counselling services in school and health programmes.
- **Parenting education is key to overcoming stigma.** Parenting education was key to promoting parents’ awareness and understanding of mental health issues and improving their communication with their children.

NEXT STEPS

UNICEF is continuing to work with the MoES to strengthen access to mental health support for adolescents in schools, including the development of mental health support teams. UNICEF is also planning to support the Mongolian Government in conducting a national survey to explore gender barriers to adolescent mental health that will inform future MHPSS programming.